

Value Education in Plato's Meno

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Abstract

No doubt society needs skilled professionals and good citizens. But it is forgotten that we are also humans we must behave like sane, rational and responsible beings. The word "human" is value-loaded term. Sense of values or morality is a special feature of human beings, so a man who loses this sense of morals and other values is a brute without a tail

Meno is a Socratic dialogue written by Plato. It appears to attempt to determine the definition of virtue, or meaning of virtue in general, rather than particular virtues, such as justice or temperance. The first part of the work is written in the Socratic dialectical style and Meno is reduced to confusion. In response to Meno's paradox (or the learner's paradox), however, Socrates introduces positive ideas: the immortality of the soul, the theory of knowledge as recollection, which Socrates demonstrates by posing a mathematical puzzle to one of Meno's slaves, the method of hypothesis, and, in the final lines, the distinction between knowledge and true belief. The discussion then turns to the question of accounting for the fact that so many people are mistaken about good and evil and take one for the other. Socrates asks Meno to consider whether good things must be acquired virtuously in order to be really good. Socrates leads onto the question of whether virtue is one thing or many.

Key Words: Good Citizens, humans, rational, *Meno*, the immortality, paradox, Socratic dialogue

Introduction:

It is rightly said that character is differentiating quality (vyavachhedaka lakshana) of human being. Lacking of character in human being's life is root cause of all problems.

We can unreservedly say that professional skills (competence) without integrity or compassion is dangerous and a man of professional skills (competence) without character (compassion and affection) is more dangerous than a poisonous snake. And important fact is that with the help of value education character must be developed. In other words, we can say that value education is means (Instrument) and character development is end of human being's life.

No doubt society needs skilled professionals and good citizens. But it is forgotten that we are also humans we must behave like sane, rational and responsible beings. The word "human" is value-loaded term. Sense of values or morality is a special feature of human beings, so a man who loses this sense of morals and other values is a brute without a tail. In this context Albert Einstein, the greatest humanist scientist has made a very relevant and significant remark. In one of his lectures delivered in New York in 1952, he remarks, "It is not enough to teach a man a specialty. Through it he may become a kind of useful machine, but not a harmoniously developed personality. It is essential that a student acquires an understanding of and a lively feeling of values. He must acquire a vivid sense of the beautiful and of the morally good. Otherwise he with his specialized knowledge more closely resembles a well-trained dog than a harmoniously developed personality",¹

This Einstein statement is so clear in its import that it does not need any comments to elaborate or interpret it.

Value Education according to Plato:

But about value education Plato raised very crucial question in his dialogue Meno i.e. can virtue be taught?

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The Dialogue in Meno:

The dialogue begins with Meno asking Socrates to tell him if virtue can be taught. Socrates says that he does not know what virtue is, and neither does anyone else he knows.² Meno responds that, according to Gorgias, virtue is different for different people, that what is virtuous for a man is to conduct himself in the city so that he helps his friends, injures his enemies, and takes care all the while that he personally comes to no harm. Virtue is different for a woman, he says. Her domain is the management of the household, and she is supposed to obey

her husband. He says that children (male and female) have their own proper virtue, and so do old men—free or slaves.³ Socrates objects: there must be some virtue common to all human beings.

Socrates rejects the idea that human virtue depends on a person's sex or age. He leads Meno towards the idea that virtues are common to all people, that temperance (*sophrosunê*- exercising self-control) and justice (refraining from harming other people) are virtues even in children and old men.⁴ Meno proposes to Socrates that the "capacity to govern men" may be a virtue common to all people. Socrates points out to the slaveholder that "governing well" cannot be a virtue of a slave, because then he would not be a slave.⁵

One of the errors that Socrates points out is that Meno lists many particular virtues without defining a common feature inherent to virtues which makes them thus. Socrates remarks that Meno makes many out of one, like somebody who breaks a plate.⁶

Meno proposes that virtue is the desire for good things and the power to get them. Socrates points out that this raises a second problem—many people do not recognize evil.⁷The discussion then turns to the question of accounting for the fact that so many people are mistaken about good and evil and take one for the other. Socrates asks Meno to consider whether good things must be acquired virtuously in order to be really good.⁸Socrates leads onto the question of whether virtue is one thing or many.

No satisfactory definition of virtue emerges in the *Meno*. Socrates' comments, however, show that he considers a successful definition to be unitary, rather than a list of varieties of virtue, that it must contain all and only those terms which are genuine instances of virtue, and must not be circular.⁹

What does mean Knowledge according to Socrates:

According to Socrates , “ Knowledge is the highest good , so Socrates answers. The central thesis of the Socratic ethics is contained in the formula: ‘Knowledge is virtue’ . Right thinking is essential to right action”¹⁰ But how to decide which is good action and which is bad action? This is very critical question. Suppose there is a leader of village. He digs well and makes arrangement for drinking water for villagers. If we see this act superficially it looks good. But in next few months election is going to happen in that village and he wants votes from villagers.

Therefore without examining intention behind action we cannot decide , action is good or bad.

So, I think to decide action good or bad , we should apply following statements i.e.

1. Good action done with good motive (intention) is of course good.
2. Bad action done with bad motive (intention) is of course bad.
3. Bad action done with good motive (intention) is good.
4. Good action done with bad motive (intention) is of course bad.

In this connection Kant's Philosophy of ethics has great importance , he says, “Human behavior is good if intention behind this behavior will become universal law and Human behavior is bad if intention behind this behavior will not become universal law”

In Plato's *Meno* it is stated that virtue is different for different people. But if we apply these statements and Kant's thinking then virtues or moral values can not become different from person to person.

And last and the most important point which is stated in *Meno* i.e. virtue can not be taught. Yes, definitely virtue can not be taught like mathematics, science ,technology etc.,but definitely virtue can be caught. In this connection in the Śrīmad Bhagavadā Gītā in the third Chapter in 21st verse rightly said that ,

“*yad-yad ācarati śreṣṭhas
tad-tad eve'taro janāḥ
sa yat pramāṇam kurute
lokas tad anuvartate (Gītā 3/21)*

(For whatsoever a great human being does, the same is done by others as well. Whatever standard he sets, people follow).

But I think for this purpose we have to take efforts.

Conclusion:

We must create character in our own life and we must create and maintain a value charged atmosphere in the home (family institution), the academic institutions, political institutions, educational complexes. Unfortunately, homes are converting in modern hostels, there is character crisis in life of leaders in political institution, educational complexes are becoming very profitable business centers. Will the managements of the educational centers listen to this criticism? There is no need of lecturing on morality . Values must be made integral to the process of teaching and learning. I would like to end with the wise words of an English poet laureate Tennyson:



“ Let knowledge go from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell,
That mind and soul according well,
May make one music as before.”
And according to Plato , “ Music is the movement of sound to reach the soul for the education of its virtue.”

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